DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 751 JC 880 297

AUTHOR Heard, Frank B.
TITLE The Development of a Retention Plan To Mitigate Low Enrollments at Shelby State Community College.
PUB DATE May 88
NOTE 43p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Advising; Community Colleges; Declining Enrollment; *Dropout Prevention; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; *School Holding Power; Two Year Colleges; Withdrawal (Education)
IDENTIFIERS *Shelby State Community College TN

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Shelby State Community College (SSCC) in Tennessee to determine the extent, causes, and solutions to the problem of student retention. The study involved: (1) a comparative analysis of headcounts to assess the extent of the dropout problem, which indicated that enrollments declined sharply from 5,289 in 1983 to 3,399 in 1987 even though new enrollments were fairly stable during that period; (2) an analysis of data on 50 randomly selected student withdrawals to determine why students discontinued enrollments at SSCC, which revealed that many students had not officially withdrawn, that most had not given specific reasons for withdrawing, and that many who gave "academic" reasons for withdrawing were actually in good academic standing; and (3) a review of the literature on the nature and scope of student attrition and on retention factors to help devise a retention plan to mitigate low enrollments. Based on study findings, a retention plan focusing on faculty awareness and development activities, peer counseling, career assistance, learning support activities, expanded orientation, and improved academic advising was developed. (EJV)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RETENTION PLAN TO MITIGATE LOW ENROLLMENTS AT SHELBY STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Societal Factors Affecting Education Seminar

by

Frank B. Heard, M.B.A.

Shelby State Community College

Dr. Charles W. Collins

The Atlanta Regional Cluster

A Practicum presented to Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

May, 1988

SC 880 297

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ABSTRACT

The problem of student dropouts, the decline in the college-age population, and scarce resources has caused great concern on college and university campuses across the country. These societal demographic realities have caused institutions of higher learning to concentrate resources and attention on the problem of retention. This study focused on determining the extent, causes, and solutions to the retention problem at Shelby State Community College (SSCC), an urban, state-assisted, postsecondary institution in Tennessee.

An analysis of data on student withdrawals was conducted to determine why students discontinued enrollments at SSCC. A comparative analysis of headcount enrollments was conducted to determine the extent of student dropouts at SSCC. An intensive review of the literature was conducted to obtain information on the nature and scope of attrition and retention factors, and to obtain information from which to devise a retention plan to mitigate low enrollments at SSCC.

Findings from the above procedures revealed that the extent of the problem was greater than initially suspected, and that successful retention plans must include multi-faceted intervention strategies. It was also found that such retention efforts must include a high level of student involvement, faculty-student interaction, and must focus on the academic and social domains.

Recommendations derived from the study were to 1) implement the General Retention Plan derived from the study, 2) conduct a two-year retrospective study to determine needed modifications in the plan, 3) evaluate the plan annually, and 4) use the practicum document to raise awareness of the retention problem among faculty and staff.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most prodigious problems on the minds of higher education administrators across the country today is the problem of declining enrollments. As early as the 1950s, educators became aware of a growing problem of retention on American college campuses. At the end of World War II, freshman classes were large as returning soldiers used their GI benefits to attend in great numbers. These large freshman classes, however, did not produce a large number of graduates because many students dropped out before acquiring a degree. Of the more than fifteen million men and women entering colleges and universities during the 1980s, only five or six million will actually earn a degree.

The traditional population of higher education students is changing. Student interest in available postsecondary options is also changing among institutional sectors, fields of study, and careers. No longer can institutions look to recruitment of the traditional high school student prospect pool to ensure enrollment stability and continued growth; there is no current or expected onslaught of returning GIs to swell the freshman classes. The baby boom is over and institutions of higher learning are gathering all of their collective resources, ingenuity, and management expertise to tackle the problem of remaining

financially afloat in the wake of the most serious decline in enrollment--and source of higher education funding--in the history of this country. So much is this a problem that it is now common to find administrators at many professional conferences with the title "Director/Dean/Vice President of Enrollment Management." Essentially, institutions are taking a broader look at how to more effectively "manage" enrollments through marketing, strategic planning, and retention. Clearly, a retention agenda for fifth-generation community colleges and the nation's universities is a priority. The primary purpose of enrollment management and marketing strategies in higher education is to assure a systematic, deliberate effort to make realistic adjustments in plans and programs consistent with the institution's purpose and mission.

Shelby State Community College (SSCC) is an urban, state-assisted, two-year institution in Memphis, Tennessee that has experienced serious enrollment declines over the past few years. These enrollment declines have been systematic and appear to be highly responsive to external societal factors in the service delivery area. An analysis of the enrollment data obtained from SSCC's Institutional Research Office for the past several years revealed that the institution's "drawing power" has not decreased notably since the percentage of new students from year to year has remained almost constant. It has been concluded, therefore, that the problem lies in the institution's ability to retain

students. This conclusion was the conceptual base from which the emphasis on retention emerged. The recognition of the retention factor as the major cause of enrollment declines at SSCC led to the development of this practicum. This investigation was focused on determining the extent of the retention problem at SSCC, reviewing the literature to obtain a thorough knowledge of the prior related research on the causes and solutions for the retention problem, and devising an appropriate plan of action to mitigate the problem at SSCC.

Therefore, the purpose of this practicum was to develop a retention plan to mitigate low enrollments at SSCC. This was done by studying the extent and major causes of attrition at SSCC through an analysis of available data on SSCC's enrollment and retention pattern. The results of this investigation were utilized to make decisions regarding appropriate corrective actions to include in the retention plan.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This practicum is related to the Societal Factors Affecting Education Seminar in that the societal reality of fewer students graduating from high school and college is discussed. It is also related to the seminar because the effects of demographic changes in the population as they affect the higher education industry is discussed; and it is focused on the changes and responses that are available to

higher education to mitigate the effects of these societal phenomena.

Etiology and Nature of Enrollment Declines

For quite some time population experts have pointed out that the slacking off of the birth rate in the early 1960s would provide a shrinking pool of potential college students in the 1980s. With the exception of 1988, when there is expected to be a slight increase, the decline in the number of 18-year-olds that began in 1980 will continue and reach a maximum decrease of nearly 26 percent by 1992 (Scarlett, 1986). In the Fall of 1983, enrollment patterns in higher education institutions were undergoing very noticeable change. While overall enrollments in the nation's colleges and universities were up by 1.1 percent, and came at a time that a drop had been expected because of a shrinking number of 18-year-olds, the increase was due primarily to an increase in part-time enrollment in community, technical, and junior colleges, both public and private (Higher Education and National Affairs, 1983). For example, Shelby State Community College's (SSCC) headcount enrollment increased to an all-time 5,289 students that year (SIS Report, Fall, 1983). Proprietary schools (those that operate for profit and are chiefly business or technical) saw an 8.8 percent decline in part-time enrollment, but a 13.4 percent increase in full-time enrollment. This was a significant change for these students, indicating the

possibility of an increased emphasis on job training and career change. Despite this occurrence, researchers and educators nationwide predict that by 1993, the population of 18-24 year-olds will decrease by 24.6 million, a drop of about 18 percent from 1983. However, due to an increase in older population groups, enrollment is expected to fall only about 11.6 million in 1993, about a 6 percent decrease (Higher Education and National Affairs, 1983).

According to a profile compiled by the Division of Policy Analysis and Research, American Council on Education (Higher Education and National Affairs, 1985), between 1985 and 1995, the number of 18- to 24-year-olds will decrease by 18 percent. The number of college-age Whites is expected to decrease at a greater rate than Blacks during this period (19 percent versus 14 percent). Between 1985 and 1990, the white college-age population is expected to decline by 2.6 million, while the black college-age population is expected to decrease by 0.3 million. In 1986 alone, the 18- to 24-year-old population declined by 3 percent, from 28.7 million to 27.8 million. Over the next two years, the number of 18- to 24-year-olds will decline by 5 percent. According to Cecilia Ottinger, research associate in the Division of Policy Analysis and Research, American Council on Education (Higher Education and National Affairs, 1986), in the 1985 academic year enrollment in two-year institutions declined by 4 percent, while enrollment in four-year institutions remained stable. In 1984, 4.5 million students attended

two-year institutions, compared to 4.7 million in 1983. Nationally, the number of 18- to 24-year-old high school graduates has declined steadily since 1980, decreasing overall by 2 percent.

Officers and staff of colleges and universities can influence the adaptation of their institutions to the changing environment. They may elect to "go with the flow" as change occurs. The direction is not necessarily a rational choice but a manifestation of action taken to understand the nature and scope of changes in the particular institutional environment, develop strategies to accentuate unique institutional strengths, and organize institutional resources to assure effective strategic implementation. While many institutions may elect to extend traditional approaches and policies, others will seek means to enhance the adaptation of the institution in new directions. The most effective institutions in the long run are likely to be those that proceed with the difficult task of changing the culture of the institution to be sensitive and responsive to its changing publics without sacrificing its character and integrity. One thing certain for higher education institutions is that change itself will play an important role in institutional development and survival.

There are many approaches being taken by colleges and universities today to combat the declining enrollment trend. These approaches range from changing academic programs, soliciting new clientele in the form of older,

part-time, male students to changing the entire mission of the institution. It is suggested that, by far, the most effective method available to turn the enrollment crisis around is through focusing on retention. According to Scarlett (1986), the national graduation rate of entering freshmen is only 50 percent. An effective method to increase enrollment is to reduce the institution's attrition rate. This method is more cost effective than bringing in more freshmen, which requires establishing more class sections for freshmen at additional cost. Distributing more students, through better retention, in sophomore classes where enrollments tend to be sequentially smaller will likely require no additional sections and will actually reduce the cost of instruction (Scarlett, 1986).

Literature Review on Retention and Attrition

Research has been conducted to determine the reasons for attrition and to determine methods of retaining students. A continuous high attrition rate has prompted numerous studies to count, describe, and classify the dropout student as indicated below. A review of the literature on student attrition and retention revealed that such studies have varied greatly in their design and emphasis, from those which have simply counted the number of dropouts to longitudinal studies designed to identify predictive factors. However, a strong relationship in the results of such studies and the retention plan developed for

this practicum appears to exist in that caution has been exercised in not selecting strategies that neglect the multifaceted approach.

Early studies by Cope and Hannah (1975) found that when students were asked their reasons for dropping out, they indicated financial, academic, and personal reasons. Such responses give little information to help institutions provide intervention measures. It was determined that the answer of "personal" was given because it was a good "catch-all," and the answer of "financial" was given because it was an acceptable answer (Cope, 1978). Later studies found that boredom, lack of motivation, and feelings of alienation were often cited among the list of reasons given by students for dropping out (Astin, 1976; Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1980; Cesa, 1980).

Gekosk and Schwartz (1961) questioned the utility of studies which asked students why they drop out; they found that the problems identified by dropouts were equally shared by those students who remained in college until they acquired a degree. Hackman and Dysinger (1970) agreed when they stated that "almost all of the problems reported as reasons for withdrawal by students who leave college are shared by a large number of students who do not withdraw."

As studies were designed to describe dropping out behavior, researchers began to realize that few attempted to explain the complex factors which bring about the decision to drop out. As a result, several exploratory theories of

college student attrition were developed to lend conceptual coherence to the body of research concerning the dropout.

In an interactional model Spady (1970, 1971) described how personal attributes such as disposition, interests, ability, attitudes, and skills interact with environmental influences and sources of demands such as courses, faculty members, administrators, and peers. This interaction provides integration of the social and academic domains of the students. While Spady acknowledged the importance of student social integration with the college environment, the major emphasis of this model is on the academic domain.

A second model developed was Rootman's (1972) interactional theory. The emphasis of Rootman's model is on those students who voluntarily withdraw. He asserts that persistence is determined by the degree of the "personal fit" achieved by students as they interact with the environment. Rootman's model recognizes voluntary withdrawal as a means of coping with the strain produced by a lack of individual and interpersonal fit.

Additionally, individuals who are not able to conform to the demands of the college environment, according to Rootman's model, must resolve the conflict either by modifying their properties (their personalities, interests, or values) or by making themselves more attractive to their fellow students. If conformity is not possible, the student will leave the institution.

Tinto (1975) agreed with Spady that both social and academic achievement was necessary for a fulfilling college career, and designed a model which provided for the integration of these two factors. Tinto found that student attrition occurs most often when students achieve academically but cannot establish a social identity on campus, or when students establish a social identity on campus but cannot achieve academically. Tinto (1975) states that when all the factors are equal, the higher the student's level of social and academic integration, the greater the commitment to the specific institution and the more likely the student is to persist at the institution.

While Rootman's model was virtually ignored by researchers, the theoretical models of Spady (1970, 1971) and Tinto (1975) were widely accepted in the field of attrition research. Most interventions on campus followed Tinto's and Spady's models and focused on the two areas of emphasis in their models, namely the academic and social domains. Many intervention programs have been found to reduce attrition. Those cited most often are career counseling (Tinto, 1982a), increased extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1982a), improved admissions practices (Tinto, 1982a), and improved faculty advising and student orientation (Beal and Noel, 1979). However, these interventions have often been disjointed and have not considered the total student. Sheffield and Meskill (1974) suggest that no one approach is acceptable and that the intervention program

must be multifaceted. Without a multifaceted program, one portion of the attrition problem might be aggravated while attempts are being made to alleviate other factors. This clearly suggests a wholistic approach to the problem.

Interventions that focus on the "whole" person and do not concentrate on just one aspect of student attrition must be developed. In the past, institutions have tried to help students acquire academic skills with remedial courses, but these have often failed because these programs did not include the social skills needed by students, nor did they include modification of self-attitudes that often lead to failure. Formal orientation programs have not been shown to be successful because they have mostly evolved into social gatherings that leave students more bewildered than helped. Shaffer and Martinson (1966) stated that such orientation sessions often become "disorientation" sessions because they give a biased, chaotic, and distorted perception of higher education. If the total needs of students are to be met, the intervention must address the social, personal as well as the academic concerns of students.

Spady (1971) stated that academic performance is clearly the dominant factor in student attrition and later research verifies that the academic development of the student has a direct relationship with retention (Astin, 1976; Beal and Noel, 1980). A study by Terenzini and Pascarella (1978) indicates that the academic integration of the student is more important than any other factor for

increased retention. Therefore, it can be assumed that intervention programs that provide academic assistance can profit all students. Yet, all students have not needed the extensive remediation that has been the focus of many intervention programs. It has often been noted that, while some students need skills in specific areas, more students can benefit from study skills sessions that include information about notetaking, time management, test-taking skills, listening, and decision-making.

To help enhance the academic progress of students, it may be necessary to determine the individual learning styles of students (Murrell & Thomas, 1987). Students learn in different ways; some are visual learners, some learn best by reading or listening, while others learn best by doing. It is important that students, faculty, and academic advisors understand that the identification of individual learning styles can facilitate the learning process. Kolb (1981) identified four primary ways that students learn: concrete experience which emphasizes personal involvement in learning; reflective observation which focuses on understanding of ideas and situations from different points of view; abstract conceptualization which involves using logic and ideas to plan and solve problems; and active experimentation which involves a concern for influencing and changing situations. Students who become effective learners use each style and know their strengths and weaknesses in relation to each style of learning. Faculty and advisors need to help

students identify their weaknesses and strengths and then develop strategies to deal with classroom requirements.

Although poor grades are a stable predictor of attrition, good grades are definitely not an accurate predictor of retention. Trent and Medsker (1967) suggest that if attrition could be accounted for solely on the basis of lack of academic ability, then a solution might lie in identifying those without academic ability and helping them find means to foster self-development in other settings. Lindgren (1969) contends, however, that the great majority of students who drop out have the academic ability to succeed and if only academic intervention is needed, institutions should have solved their dropout problems long ago. Successful programs, Lindgren stresses, must also deal with factors such as social and self-development.

The importance of social integration with the college community was established by Spady (1971) when he emphasized that social integration was second only to academic performance in determining student retention. The need for social interaction becomes more important as students advance from freshmen to sophomores (Lokitz and Sprandel, 1976). Research by Siryk (1981) indicates that social interaction is more closely related to plans to persist or withdraw than academic performance for those students who have been classified as high-risk students.

Bianchi and Bean (1980) examined the importance of academic and social integration for students who voluntarily

withdraw. They found that a combination of poor academic performance and social immaturity was a characteristic of both low-achieving persisters and voluntary withdrawals.

Tinto's attrition model is based on the integration of both the academic and social domains of the student for a successful college career. Verification of this model has been the subject of studies by Pascarella and Terenzini (1979, 1980). The results of a 1979 study conducted by these researchers were intrepreted to indicate that social integration included such things as extra-curricular activities, peer relations, and informal contacts with faculty. Because selection of a major tends to increase the students' feelings of belonging, selection of a major is also considered a part of social integration. The findings of this study of 773 freshmen were interpreted to indicate that characteristics brought by the student to the institution, such as academic and intellectual ability, were not as important as the social integration which took place after the student arrived.

Kowalski (1977) also stressed the important of students' social and academic integration into the college environment. He found that if students possess the academic and social skills for college success, the environment is rewarding to them; but if students lack those skills needed for academic success, the environment is a source of great dissatisfaction and the probability of withdrawal is increased. In a related study, Cope (1978) determined that

both dropouts and stopouts perceive themselves as having less social integration than do persisters. Other social factors that contribute to feelings of belonging and improved student retention are: (a) interaction with university facilities (Churchill and Stanley, 1981), (b) quality of faculty advisement (Crockett, 1978; Kowalski, 1977), and (c) selection of a major (Crockett, 1978).

Intervention studies of the late 1970's and early 1980's noted that an important factor was missing from Tinto's model of social and academic integration. In 1982 Tinto acknowledged that his earlier model did not focus on important factors such as values, attitudes, and communication skills, which have been shown to play a significant role in increased retention. Results of studies conducted by Pascarella and Terenzini (1979, 1980) have been interpreted to indicate that, while the importance of the integration of the social and academic skills cannot be overlooked, the personal development of the student is of equal importance.

Such findings causes one to look once again at Rootman's model of personal fit. The results of a study by Edwards and Waters (1982) verified the "college-personal fit" model when they found that retention increases when there is congruence of the values, goals, and attitudes of the individual students and those of the institution.

Student attitude has been considered an important element in many retention studies. Lindgren (1969) asserted

that intervention action must deal with ways of helping students develop positive self-concepts because academic failure is a result of an interrelation of student attitudes and deficiency in one or more skills. This theory was later verified in a study conducted by Silver (1979) in which she found that a self-development seminar for freshmen resulted in significant increases in GPA's, hours earned, and retention.

The writings of Bean (1980), Pascarella (1979), and Spady (1971) suggest that the determinants of attrition and/or retention are not merely shaped by the kinds of students enrolled in colleges, but are influenced significantly by institutional conditions such as programs, policies, organizational patterns, and interactive climate after student matriculation. Pascarella (1979) noted that what happens to a student after matriculating may be more important than are the attributes the student brings to the college.

In spite of many years of research, hundreds of publications, and many carefully controlled studies on factors contributing to attrition and retention, very few solutions to this complex problem have been identified. The main conclusion to draw from the research is that it is impossible to isolate a single cause for attrition; no simple solution exists. General conclusions can be drawn from the research. It may certainly be concluded that improved retention is possible and that action programs can

be devised to respond to circumstances on particular campuses.

There are certain basic characteristics that appear to be linked to attrition and retention. According to Lenning, Beal and Sauer (1980), there are four main student types: the persister, who continues enrollment without interruption; the stop-out, who leaves the institution for a period of time and then returns for additional study; the attainer, who drops out prior to graduation, but after attaining a particular goal; and the drop-out, who leaves the institution and does not return for additional study at any time.

The Lenning document describes the student characteristics, the environmental characteristics, and the interactions between student and institution that seem to relate positively to attrition and retention. The document summarized the various characteristics that Lenning et al. saw as negatively or positively related to retention. In each case, the relationship of the item to retention was indicated by a plus (+), a minus (-), an M (for mixed findings), or a zero (for no relationship). The research on student retention indicated that many variables affect whether the student decides to stay or leave--variables that are linked to the circumstances of a particular institution and its student body. These findings are consistent with the above-mentioned writings of Bean (1980), Pascarella (1979), and Spady (1971).

The problem of retention has not been the exclusive domain of learning theorists and researchers mentioned above. Recent thoughts within the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) suggest that, with respect to retention, any given institution should: 1) organize for the improvement of retention and, 2) devise specific intervention strategies.

Some advocates of retention contend that the most critical aspect of this process is the priority assigned to it by the president and other chief administrators. Retention efforts are apt to fail if they have not first achieved a directive and significant support from the president of the institution. A retention program that is truly institution-wide will require joint action from more than one administrative area, and inevitably will draw from institutional funds otherwise utilized by one vested interest group or another. It is inconceivable that the president should not be vitally concerned with admissions and with the drawing power of the institution. The president should likewise be intimately involved and concerned with the institution's retention power.

By far, the most successful programs set out initially to take many forms of action. The many forms of action that can take place, however, fall under three general areas of concern: 1) Academic Stimulation and Assistance, 2) Personal Future Building, and 3) Involvement Experiences. Academic Stimulation and Assistance is the

focal point around which the entire institution revolves, and it must receive primary emphasis. A wide variety of programs that have been shown to have great potential for improving student retention have been devised under this heading. Personal Future Building emphasizes the identification and clarification of student goals and directions. The various programs in this area might overlap, of course, but the ultimate thrust has to involve assisting students in clarifying their personal needs and interests and learning how the college experience can contribute to their development. Involvement Experience is still an area hazed in gray, for it is yet to be fully understood. However, the single term best describing this area is "student involvement."

In the Fall term, 1985, the Board of Regents of the State University and Community College System of Tennessee (SBR) embarked upon a program of remedial and developmental studies to educate underprepared post-secondary students at SBR institutions. SBR's "White Paper" (1984) defines remedial studies as a program of instruction that leads to proficiency in the Basic Skills Competencies defined by the Tennessee State Department of Education as its "Objectives for the Tennessee proficiency Test." It defines developmental studies as a program of instruction that is distinct from remedial studies that leads to the level of proficiency in the "Basic Academic Subjects" defined by the Educational EQuality Project of the College Board as required for

successful pursuit of college studies. Many of the "retention activities" listed above must become an integral part of this program at SSCC. One of the basic assumptions inherent in this program is that the institution must keep or "retain" students in the program in order to prepare them educationally. During the first year of the program's implementation in 1985, marginal immediate results in retaining students were seen. Since that time, the retention curve has taken a steep downward turn. Clearly the needs of these students have been identified but not fully addressed. It would be a moot point to question the intent of the program in relationship to its obvious benefit and end result, for it is evident that to address the problem of educational underpreparedness in Tennessee is at the same time to attack attrition in part. The problem of attrition extends far beyond the boundaries of purely academic concerns.

All too clearly, the literature may be interpreted to suggest that retention is related to many factors. The level of preparedness brought by the student upon initial matriculation is but one of those factors. Equally important is what the institution does after the student is enrolled. Earlier remediation efforts proved marginal at best. Programs were poorly conceived, poorly designed and even poorly implemented.

It was stated in a 1968 study that few students ever moved beyond the remedial experience. In fact, as many as

90 percent of all students in remedial courses failed or withdrew from them (Roueche, 1968). Community colleges were offering remedial education but with disastrous results. The open door was fast becoming a "revolving door."

Now that these distinctions have been made, it is in order to proceed to an exploration of the specific methodology utilized to focus on the retention problem at SSCC.

PROCEDURES

What can be done to turn the problem of declining enrollments around? As previously mentioned, there are many approaches used by colleges and universities today to combat this trend. Likewise, there are many courses of action available to SSCC to improve retention and make a significant impact on the problem of declining enrollments in the remaining 1980s and 1990s. These approaches range from changing academic programs, soliciting new clientele in the form of older, part-time, male students to changing the entire mission of the institution.

In order to determine the causes for attrition at SSCC, historical data on student dropouts were collected from a random sample of official withdrawal forms and enrollment statistics obtained from the Office of Institutional Research. These data were analyzed, in the manner indicated below, to determine the major causes for attrition. The withdrawal data were categorized by whether the cause was for academic, financial, or other reasons. Each

category was then tallied and compared statistically. The results of this analysis was utilized to determine the specific reasons that students indicated for withdrawal from SSCC. The enrollment statistics were categorized by years and compared to determine the rate of yearly enrollment decline. These data are contained in Tables 1 and 2 below.

An intensive review of the literature on retention and attrition was conducted. This literature review was conducted to gain an understanding of the factors related to retention and attrition, and to determine what already-existing retention programs have been successful at other institutions. Portions of these already existing retention programs are included for replication in the retention plan developed for this practicum. Additionally, the literature review will be utilized as a training document to raise the level of awareness about retention and attrition among faculty and staff at SSCC.

It should be noted that this study was limited to an investigation of the specific factors related to attrition and retention at SSCC and cannot be generalized to all postsecondary institutional situations. It must also be noted that some intervention strategies are already being utilized at SSCC and the resulting retention plan might be vastly different if this were not so.

RESULTS

The first step to turning the problem around was to determine the extent of the problem. This led to an analysis of the enrollments at SSCC during the period from 1983 through 1987. Table 1 below contains data on the enrollments for these years.

Table 1

SSCC Enrollment Data by Headcount

	1983 (%)	1984 (%)	1985 (%)	1986 (%)	1987 (%)
New Stud.	1119 (21)	1102 (24)	822 (22)	784 (21)	724 (21)
Totals	5289	4637	3789	3730	3399

The numbers in parentheses indicate the percentage of total enrollments represented by new students. The fact that the number (percentage) of new students has remained relatively stable supports the idea that the problem of decline in enrollments lies in retention. It should also be noted that the decline in headcount from 1983 to 1987 is 36 percent. The extent of the problem, therefore, is far greater than previously realized.

Analysis of Withdrawals

A random sample of fifty student withdrawals from each year from 1983 through 1986 was drawn for inclusion in

this study. An analysis of these withdrawals resulted in several discoveries. First, all students that discontinued enrollment did not officially withdraw. This was evident because there was not a withdrawal form on file for all students that did not return during the next year. Second, most students that officially withdrew indicated "other" as the reason for withdrawal. Third, most of the students that indicated "academic" as the reason for withdrawal were actually in good academic standing. Finally, of those indicating "financial" as the reason for withdrawal, it was assumed that this was a correct response. This assumption was based on the fact that the college's records were inadequate to verify financial status. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Summary Data on Withdrawals

Year n=50	Academic	(%)	Financial	(%)	Other	(%)	Totals
1983	11	22	08	16	31	62	50
1984	08	16	06	12	36	72	50
1985	15	30	03	06	32	64	50
1986	12	24	02	04	36	72	50
Sum	46	23	19	10	135	67	200
Mean	11.5		4.75		33.75		

The data in Table 2 above indicate that from 1983 through 1986, most of the fifty students in the sample for each respective year withdrew from the college for "other" reasons (mean = 33.75). This may be interpreted to indicate that insufficient data has been collected by the college to determine the "actual" reason for withdrawals in this category. The mean score of those indicating "academic" as the reason for withdrawal was 11.5, while the average score of those indicating "financial" reasons for withdrawal was 4.75.

Information obtained from the literature review revealed there are many factors that contribute to retention. The literature review further verified that the problem of retention is complex and cannot be significantly affected with a single intervention action. The literature review served to highlight the idea that a successful retention effort must be multifaceted and include a high degree of student involvement and faculty-student interaction.

Utilizing the information obtained from the analysis of withdrawals, SSCC enrollment data, and the literature review, the SSCC General Retention Plan (Appendix A) was formulated. The General Retention Plan is a multifaceted list of action strategies designed to reduce student dropouts. These strategies involve strengthening students both academically and socially in a goal-oriented educational environment. The General Retention Plan is also designed

to incorporate a high degree of student involvement and faculty-student interaction as suggested in the literature.

Additionally, the SSCC General Retention Plan resulting from this practicum received the approval and commitment of the President of SSCC (Appendix B). Many of the strategies listed in the Plan will be implemented immediately, achieving full implementation over the 1988-89 school year.

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Just as small liberal arts colleges lose students because of limited curricular offerings, community colleges often lose students because of job demands. It is not unusual when more than half of the students do not return for a second year; in fact, 30 to 40 percent usually do not return after the first term. Many of them sample what the college has to offer, but leave after only one brief experience. Many students with adequate academic aptitudes and skills lack a serious commitment to college. Many such students attend community colleges today (especially in urban areas like Memphis), show up to get their Veterans benefits or Basic Grants, and then disappear when they get a job; should the job be lost, they might reappear. Obviously, the primary reason for attrition is neither easy to determine or to remedy.

There probably will be little that we can do to retain a portion of any student group, no matter how well we

perform the essential tasks of admission, advising, and instruction. However, the research has shown that the tide can be turned, and turn it we must.

The specific recommendations derived from this study were as follows:

1. The college should implement the retention strategies listed in the SSCC General Retention Plan, Appendix A.
2. A two-year retrospective study should be conducted to determine needed modifications in the retention plan.
3. The retention plan should be evaluated each year based on the change in the percentage of continuing students compared to new students.
4. This practicum should be used as a vehicle by which to raise the awareness of the retention problem among faculty and key administrators.

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APPENDIX A

SHELBY STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE GENERAL RETENTION PLAN

GENERAL RETENTION PLAN

SHELBY STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

1988-89

The following action interventions are to be designed and/or implemented beginning with the Fall, 1988 Semester:

1. Faculty Awareness and Development Activities

   a. Campus-wide review and evaluation of advising system

   b. "Let's talk teaching," a monthly faculty forum discussing teaching excellence and improvement of instruction

   c. A seminar in college teaching available for graduate credit for faculty

   d. Improvement of instruction grants

   e. All-college seminars on retention-attrition-recruitment

   f. Faculty advising workshops relating advising and retention

   g. Term-long workshops to identify students with characteristics of dropouts

   h. Week-long faculty workshop for retention and advisement

   i. Kellogg faculty development program

   j. Ongoing faculty instructional development program consisting of seminars, workshops, a faculty development library, and a newsletter

   k. Two-day preschool workshop for faculty on effective teaching and evaluation of teaching.

2. "Significant Other" Peer Activities

   a. Establish credit course on orientation conducted by peer counselors

   b. Freshman seminar meeting once a week each term facilitated by selected student leaders

c. Use sophomore students as peer advisors in a center for minority student affairs

d. Student-to-student program designed for adults entering college five years or more after high school.

3. Career Assistance Strategies

a. Workshop for freshmen covering career planning, study skills, leadership and assertiveness

b. Summer workshops on college and career planning

c. Development of "career pathfinder guide" for assistance with students in career planning

d. Non-credit course on "Where Do I Go From Here With My Life?"

4. Learning Support Centers and Activities

a. Education 1201: Improvement of Learning Skills. A three-semester-hour elective course taught by peer counselors who receive course skills training

b. Two-day workshop prior to fall term, and weekly group meetings with peer advisors, during the first six weeks of the term, to cover basic skills

c. Individual needs program with comprehensive support services

d. Academic assistance including mini-courses, reading lab, personal counseling, and student orientation

e. Creation of study skills program, opportunities for individualized help, and workshops

f. Supplemental class instruction through a student learning center

g. Establishment of a learning center offering orientation, peer-tutoring, minicourses, and learning lab

h. Individual academic tutoring in departmental subject areas

i. Learning lab for developmental English and reading courses for one credit hour

5. Expanded Orientation Activities

a. Mentor programs: a term-long program with a

student-faculty team in weekly sessions, one-and-a-half hours in length

b. Special orientations designed for transfer students

c. A class entitled "Learning Resources," which explores the purpose of the liberal arts and the resources in the college

d. Summer orientations designed to include testing, and placement followed up by freshman studies sequence

e. Freshman overnight experience in a quasi-wilderness environment

f. New student colloquium--one-hour-per-week sessions

g. Special workshops for nontraditional students, including motivation, values clarification, self-esteem, shyness

h. Summer orientation for beginning freshmen and parents

i. A series of life-skills workshops to assist students who live independently.

6. Effective Academic Advising

a. A restructured academic advisement program, involving intensive work with faculty

b. A new advising/counseling procedure to follow up all students with low midterms

c. A central advising center staffed with volunteer faculty members

d. A student academic advisement manual combined with a handbook for advisors

e. Faculty advising with a peer advisor to assist the faculty member

f. Establishment of university parallel advising and counseling for students in transfer programs

g. Establishment of advisement support centers for each academic division

h. Academic exploration program with decentralized advising

i. Establishment of a student advisement center for undecided freshmen and all other students with academic questions

j. Faculty advisors specially trained to counsel new students

k. Assignment of senior faculty members as advisors to honor roll and dean's list students

APPENDIX B

PRESIDENT'S MEMORANDUM OF COMMITMENT AND APPROVAL

Shelby State Community College
P.O. Box 40568 • Memphis, Tennessee 38174-0568 • 901/528-6700

SSCC

MEMORANDUM

TO: Frank B. Heard
Dean of Student Affairs

FROM: Raymond C. Bowen
President

SUBJECT: SSCC General Retention Plan

DATE: May 26, 1988

Please be advised that subject plan has been reviewed, and found acceptable for implementation at Shelby State during the 1988-89 academic year. Please prepare an excerpt of the literature review section of your practicum for appropriate distribution.

/bm

ERIC Clearinghouse for
Junior Colleges AUG 26 1988